

21 January 1963

NEW ASPECTS OF THE LADDER OF SELF-REALIZATION

PART I

So far you have been given the simplest definition of the Seven Steps – describing the process as it would be presented to an ordinary unprepared person starting at the beginning. But we must be continually reminded that we all start now in a much more favourable situation due to all our efforts hitherto and the help we have received. The Shankaracharya kept stressing that we are all well and truly ‘on the Way’; no doubt of that. This makes a vast difference.

To begin with: the very fact that we searched until we found the right School, were accepted and found our place in it, means that we all of us started from birth with a certain advantage, which (being in the Essence) resulted from the experience of our previous lives as well as from a favourable family and general environment. At one talk (October 19th) he referred to four factors which govern human actions according to his System:

- 1) Our span of time,
- 2) Our own nature,
- 3) The nature of the action,
- 4) The Three Gunas.

On the subject of the second one – ‘our own nature’ – he spoke as follows:

Lower types of people who are under Accident or Chance have two possibilities. These accidents sometimes lead a man into good company, sometimes into bad company. Even if a child is placed in a completely foreign environment, his Essence could change the place and time, and the culture and environment in which he is to live. Sometimes even a good man may be led into bad ways because of the environment and circumstances. That is the level of common men. If they get good company there is chance of improvement; if they get bad company there is no chance.

But the other type are the people who are not at all governed by outward environment. They have a germ which is individual. They *will go their own way*. They may not affect others, but surely they will not be affected by others. That is their quality, and those are the people who come to the Work; they become the aspirants or the disciples. Here, there, or anywhere the Ladder is for those people.

Q. You mean it is the growth of something inside them which makes them independent of public trend or opinion?

S. Yes, these people have such a strong quality of their Essence. Take, for example, the great runner: many people run, but some few run faster and beat all of them. The people who go for discipline, or go on the Way, have something in their Essence very strong which is quite different from the ordinary material of which Essences are made; and that will shine and will lead them to some Way – whatever comes within range.

(Compare the following passage from Chapter on ‘Eternal Recurrence’, from *A New Model of the Universe*:

In this connection it must be recognized that as regards the character of the repetition of their lives people fall into different types or categories. There are people of

absolute repetition, in whose case everything, both big and little, is transmitted from one life to another. There are people whose lives have each time the same beginning, but go on with slight variations, upwards or downwards, coming to approximately the same end. There are people in whose case lives go with a definitely ascending tendency, becoming richer or stronger *outwardly*. [These are hindered by their outward success]. There are people whose lives, on the contrary, display a clearly marked descending line, which gradually destroys all that is alive in them and reduces them to nothing. [They are hypnotized by their failures.] And there are people whose life contains an *inner* ascending line, which gradually leads them out of the circle of eternal repetition and causes them to pass to another plane of being.)

Note: Whatever fluctuations and variations belong to the individual Fate or Essence, all disadvantageous elements can be transcended by finding and being accepted by the right School, provided they stay with it for long enough!

With this good start, with all our previous experience and instruction, we approach this same Ladder of progression (the same Seven Steps that would have to be climbed by everybody), but naturally can go up them more quickly and confidently. For instance, the First Step – ‘*The Good Impulse*’. In common man this either happens or it doesn’t; it comes by chance, and he may only get it ‘once in a blue moon’. Belonging to a School we get constant reminders; probably no day goes by when we are not stirred in this way. Then the Second Step – ‘*Decision*’. Decisions made by common man under ‘Law of Accident’ do not count for much. One ‘I’ makes the decision, but Chance or Accident quickly displaces that one, and others take its place. But in people already ‘on the Way’ decisions about important matters have momentum. The group of ‘I’s’ that brought you to the School are strong enough to make the ‘decision’ and implement it.

To implement a decision requires *Will*. Recall what His Holiness said about Will (14th October):

Common men have many wills – masses of them. Realized Man has one Will, and unless that is completed he does not embark on the next one. It is a law of Nature that very few wills can be accomplished, so only the Realized Man has the Real Will and can accomplish it. Common men have different wills at different times, and most of them are never fulfilled... The aspirant as he goes up the Ladder experiences the strength of Will more and more... The Will of Atman is single and complete. In the ignorant it is covered over so he does not know its full strength, but as he goes up the Ladder the strength of Atman or Will is made clear for him and he understands it more and more as he goes on. Long before he reaches the top, the third stage (‘Effort’) and the fourth stage (‘Pull of the Way’) determine that he is getting quite strong Will in himself; and by the time he crosses the fourth stage he has attained so much Will that there is no question of that aspirant coming down the Ladder again.

So though the steps of the Ladder remain always the same, they are climbed more quickly and confidently in proportion to understanding and experience.

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PART 2. 'LEARNING TO DO': A TWO-WAY PROCESS

The ascent of the Ladder refers to Being – change of level of Being – what sort of person one is. One becomes different. This is accomplished by two periods during the day when one pays attention to nothing else; it is accomplished by the influence of the School on the individual in countless ways; by the conscious influence of the fully Realized Man at certain moments; and, above all, by the overcoming of his own difficulties by the individual as he goes on. Every victory won helps the growth of Being. All this is the upward process.

But in the nature of things there is an Influence coming downwards from the top; help is being received from above. That is partly what is here meant by a 'two-way process'. Whatever one *is* comes out in one's expression, one's behaviour, and in one's words and actions. 'Doing' depends upon Being, just as much as it depends on *Knowing* what to do and how to do it.

On the final day of our talks with the Shankaracharya, instead of putting questions to him as usual we asked him if he wished to say something. He spoke as follows:

To bring about any development for the human race, Discipline is necessary. Discipline cannot be given rightly without a Realized Man. Connection with one who has himself realized the full possibilities is essential. Once a School gets this connection, then the possibilities are there for them also.

There are two kinds of possibility in such relations: The first is special *Knowledge*, and the second is *Doing* – putting that Knowledge into practice. It takes very little time to know something. You can learn things in no time! But to acquire the capacity to put that knowledge into practice, needs a long time. It requires consciousness, patience, and of course numerous checks in confirmation as you go. Because if you hear something and continue acting on it, perhaps you may have gone off the line because you have not fully understood. So frequent checking is essential. Human beings naturally hear a great many things, but as individuals they cannot do much on the basis of what they pick up. So it stops there. But in a School there is constant verification and testing. If a man keeps on working in a School there will be nothing to hinder development once you have come into connection with a fully Realized Man. You don't have to do much; you have simply to listen, put your questions, do everything you can to learn from him...

[Encourage questions. Ask, 'Upon what does "Doing" in this sense depend?']

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